DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 105 709 FL 005 459

AUTHOR Rubin, Joan
TITLE Language Standardization and Education.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the AAAS and Conacyt meeting (Mexico City, 1973); Best Copy Available, some pages and the reference list will reproduce poorly

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Definitions; Educational Planning; Grammar; Language Arts; Language Classification; *Language Planning; *Language Standardization; Language Styles; *Language Variation; Norms; Official Languages; Pronunciation; *Sociolinguistics; Spelling; *Standard Spoken Usage; Vocabulary

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the problem of language standardization in education. The areas to which standardization may refer - phonology, spelling, punctuation, grammar and lexicon - are discussed, and problems associated with efforts to standardize them in schools are pointed out. The position taken is that a decision to promote language standards should weigh the advantages against the disadvantages, i.e., clarity in communication against time and effort needed to implement and teach standard usage. The complex nature of the process of language standardization is described by analyzing six interrelated components: isolation of a norm, assignment of value, establishing a purpose for the norm, acceptance, comparison and time span. Finally, the following criteria are suggested for standardizing or maintaining a standard within the educational domain: the number of styles it is useful to isolate, and whether schools want language standardization. (AM)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED105709

Language Standardization and Education

Joan Rubin
Georgetown University

Presented to the 1973 meeting of AAAS and Conacyt in Mexico City to the session entitled "Language Planning and Sociolinguistics"

There seems to be an uneasy feeling among teachers in primary and secondary education that their job is somehow to present or promote the "Standard Language." This feeling would appear to arise in part from the fact that education often has as one of its goals the preparation of citizens for entry into the business and professional world and in part seems to derive from the more mundane choices which the establishment of curricula, the choice of textbooks and the training of teachers seem to promote. Simplicity often seems to be a motive behind standard language decisions in educational circles when such choices are consciously made.

As a matter of fact, every country must take seriously the teaching of the major language(s) of its schools. It must do so because of the several important functions which language is known to fulfill. Language serves as a means of communication between peoples--their thoughts must be clearly expressed so that understanding rather than confusion and distrust may result. Language is an important tool in the creative process, more particularly in the process of thinking scientific thoughts. If the command of a language is not adequately and fully developed, the results of thinking may be deficient and disappointing.[1] Language serves as a means of socialization and unification; it is through language that we learn to be good members of our society. For all of these reasons, the language arts are critical and proper attention must be given to their teaching.

Given that we admit that these and many other reasons make the teaching of language arts an important aspect of the educational process, the teacher is still faced with the problem of "what to teach." A natural response might for example be "good Spanish" or "correct Spanish." But there are

FL005 459

many possible interpretations of this answer. Is good Spanish the language spoken by educated people--all educated people all the time? But recent work in sociolinguistics has fully demolished the assumption that a given individual has a single style so we are left with deciding which of the styles of which individuals. As well, the assumption that a given class of people all share the same set of styles has been demonstrated to be largely false. Or is good Spanish the language spoken by well-known people, such as actors or politicians or radio announcers or government leaders? One might further ask whether they speak this language on all circumstances or only on ceremonial occasions? Or is good Spanish the language of the people of a given region, city or social class? Another interpretation might focus on written materials. "Good Spanish" might be considered that which is written by outstanding literary writers.[2] Or one might consider "Good Spanish" that which is found in grammars or dictionaries. Still another consideration in the isolation of "Good Spanish" might be the question of whether all educators all over a country agree that there is a single "Good Spanish."

Similar questions could be raised with regard to the standards to be used for any language in an educational context. Indeed, the further we look at the concept of standard, the more complex the matter becomes. Not only do we need to establish the basis or source for the standard to be used but we must decide which aspect of language we want to refer to and decide whether there is a standard in this area of language. Does "standard" refer to pronunciation? If so, is it the case that people in most regions of any one country agree that a particular way of pronouncing the language is appropriate for specified circumstances? Or do we mean by standard, the grammar or the lexicon?

At the same time we decide whether there is a standard pronunciation, we might also want to decide whether it is important for an educational institution to promote a standard. Thus, although a standard pronunciation may be generally accepted, it is worth considering whether standard pronunciation is really essential for effective communication. What factors should be taken into consideration in deciding whether a standard is useful or not? One of the functions of a standard pronunciation is to prevent misunderstanding. Another is to identify a person as being more educated or as belonging to a particular social class. It is up to the educational system to decide which of the several functions which a standard pronunciation may serve is important in their particular situation.

In addition to pronunciation, standardization may refer to spelling, punctuation or syllabification. In this area, standardization appears to be quite useful. Lack of attention can lead to misunderstanding or at least delay communication. Some variation in spelling can always be expected but schools should try to use that system which best promotes communication and best reflects the modern language.

This point should not be left without noting that although the value of a standard spelling and punctuation for communication seems great, it may not always be simple to achieve. Spelling reforms often arouse sentiments of group identification or may serve as a sounding board for expressing political views. In such cases, effecting a change or reform may prove quite difficult and the decision to promote such a change should be based on a consideration of the degree of misunderstanding extant against the costs of effecting such a change.

The question of a standard grammar is a more complicated one and must be considered both from the point of view of the kind of content to be communicated whether poetic, prose, scientific or other and from the view of the social values associated with different varieties of these styles. A standard grammar increases its value when it rests not only on the details of the language itself but also on its social and communicative functions.

In the standardization of vocabulary, it is useful to consider for what area of vocabulary a norm is needed. It is probably that schools would not find it worth the cost to try to control the daily language of its students. Additionally, one might wonder what the benefits to be gained from such an effort might be. On the other hand, it would seem worthwhile the effort to standardize technical terminology since exactness in this area of communication is essential and regionalisms may impede the spread of information.

Decisions on standards for language must be carefully made. It should be clear that the existing diversity in language is really adverse--that the diversity of language does lead to misunderstanding (something which needs to be demonstrated), that it does lead to uncertainty which might be especially bad for the beginner, or that it is indeed time-consuming. This advertisity must be weighed against the cost of promoting the standard form.

Although the need for improving language arts through education is very important and some decisions about standard language useful, we must still recognize that decisions about standards are very complex. In order to demonstrate this, I would like to elaborate the processes involved.

Because standardization refers to a process which is so complex, different aspects of the process have come to be labeled by this term.[3] In understanding the complexities of this process, it is useful to see it as consisting of six separable but interrelated parts. Each of these can in turn be analyzed into several different features. The first three, while analytically separate, always co-occur in actual fact:

1) A reference point or system is set up or comes into being, i.e. a norm is isolated.

2) Value is assigned to the reference point or system, i.e. some judgment is made by some significant group of people that the reference point or system is "good" or "correct" or "preferred" or "appropriate."

3) Specification is made or comes into being as to when and for what purposes the norm is to be used.

4) Some agreement occurs, i.e., there is such a reference point as is specified by 1,2,3. That is to say, some acceptance of 1, 2, 3 occurs.

5) 1,2,3 serve as a basis for comparison.

6) There is some span of time during which 1,2,3,4,5 are in effect.

To demonstrate how these six illustrate the standardization process, let us take an example from the publishing industry--say the establishment of stylistic norms. Thus, a group of editors might agree that in order for a textbook to meet their standards, bibliographic references must be done in a particular way (1--reference point; 2--value for the "right" way). They might specify that such norms will only be followed in textbooks and not in other commercial books (3--when and for what purposes the norm is to be used). This norm would then probably be referred back to the publishing houses for acceptance (4--acceptance). If accepted, authors would be expected to use this norm in submitting manuscripts (5--norm is used as a basis of comparison). As well, editors might correct manuscripts which did not conform to this norm (5--norm is used as a basis of comparison). The duration of the norm would depend upon when the next meeting of editors took place or whether there was some other means of establishing norms through written agreement (6--span of time).

Although I will not go into all the detailed features which this process comprises here,[4] I would like to consider some features of interest to the educational sphere.

ISOLATION OF A NORM

The isolation of a norm refers to many things. The scope of the reference point/system can be very different. The norm may refer in a general way to the entire language or it might refer only to the spelling system or to the lexicon or the pronunciation. It could even be as narrow as the pronunciation of a single word.

The norm may be quite precise or quite vague. In the area of grammar, a norm may specifically allow only one form as the standard form or the standard may refer to more general rules such as "No double negative" and still allow for the expression of this rule in many different ways. The norm may be a point or a range (or pronunciation) or an entire system. It may refer to the interrelation of parts--such as the idea that spelling should be based on pronunciation. Judgments may vary widely as to how closely an individual example is an adequate repreduction of the norm.

The norm may be defined positively or negatively. Wolfram, 1971, points out that a popularly held view of what Standard American English is, is a negative one. Hence, he says, that a group of dialects have become standardized by default, that is, Standard American English is: "a dialect(s) NOT spoken by socially stigmatized groups." Another negative definition and one quite difficult to be specific about is one which defines standardized speech as somehow "leveled." Sweet, 1908, observed that "The best speakers of standard English are those whose pronunciations and language generally least betray their locality." A more positive definition of a standard language would be one that specifies that the standard is the speech of a particular social or geographically located group.

The sources of (bases for) the norm can vary widely. Jespersen, 1925, lists several common sources for standard language: (1) the standard of authority, (2) the geographical standard, (3) the literary standard, (4) the aristocratic standard, (5) the democratic standard (6) the logical standard, and (7) the aesthetic standard. Many other sources have been used. Choice depends on the community in which the decision occurs.

ASSIGNMENT OF VALUE

The principles for assigning a value to a reference point/system are indeed a complex matter. Of interest here here is the suggestion by Danes, 1970, who discusses what sorts of theory we ought to look at in considering standardization efforts. He suggests that we see that norms are selected on the basis of a consideration of: "The essence, nature and function of the valuated object." By the essence of a language, Danes refers to the structure and history of a language. By the nature of a language, Danes refers to the social valuesattached to a particular form withinthat language. By the function of a language, Danes refers to the purposes for which it will be used.

An example of what Danes means by these three facets might be a spelling reform. If an appeal is made to the system of the language and to the general development of that language, such a judgment would be based on the essence of the evaluated object, namely its form and substande. If a judgment is made on social preferences for approximating an adjacent language, such as the decision to make French creole spelling as similar as possible to that of French, this decision appeals to the social value of a language. If a judgment is based on economy in learning or in use, such a judgment is based on the function of the evaluated object.

PURPOSE OF NORM

It is common to speak about a standard language as the only norm for all situations; to speak about it as uniform. In its less sophisticated form, "uniformation" assumes that the speakers of a standard language don't even have stylistic variants. A more sophisticated version of "uniformation" allows for some variation in terminology or in grammatical details while still assuming a limited range for the norm. The Czech view of a standard language seem more appealing. It allows for functional differentiation of norms by consideration of the different domains for which a language is to be used. Standardization efforts then are seen as a reiterative process affecting different domains of a language in different ways. A standard language seems to be one which has a complete range of expression for all domains. It lis worth noting that in many diglossic situations, the language undergoing standardization may be restricted in the functions it is expected to or can fulfill because the language of the ~~ix~~ home is different from that of business, administration or other public sectors.

I have tried to indicate a few of the complexities of the standardization process and the development of a standard language. Finally, I would like to suggest some criteria which could be used in deciding on or in maintaining a standard within the educational domain.

First, consideration should be given to the question of how many styles it is useful to isolate. If mobilization is a primary function, then mass appeal and understanding should be a prime consideration. If, on the other hand, technical specialization is important, then creation of more standardized specialized ~~xxx~~ forms might be appropriate.

Secondly, educators should consider whether schools want and need a standard pronunciation, spelling, grammar or terminology. A decision should be made as to which of these is most urgent; which of these most worth spending time and energy on.

Two precautions seem relevant here. First of all, since language is always changing, having once achieved a standard or having set a standard does not mean that this is fixed once and for all. Standardization and norms of good usage will probably change through time and what is taught should be adjusted to these changes. In many standard language communities, it is common and useful to have administrative routines which keep up with the changing standard. A second precaution which needs a great deal of attention is the following: although we have discussed those domains in which a standard might be useful, the question remains whether the schools should stick to the standard as the only kind of language permissible or correct. If full development of creative potential is to be encouraged, students should be made aware of the many stylistic possibilities and their appropriate application. Too great emphasis on any one style may hamper creativity.

The costs of establishing and maintaining a standard vary immensely from locale to locale and depend on what degree of standardization currently exists, on the available resources (both human and material) to promote standardization, on existiang values toward different varieties, and on the desires of the population toward establishing a standard.

In the Western Hemisphere, several interesting and complex examples of standardization problems have been brought to light. Eduardo Hernandez[5] argues that some variety of Chicano Spanish and not Standard Spanish should be taught in the U.S. bilingual schools on the grounds that students have little use for Standard Spanish, that language maintenance is best achieved in Chicano Spanish, and that students normally acquire inferiority feelings when standard

Spanish is taught. Gary Parker, 1973, has called our attention to the complex problems of deciding on the proper standard for teaching Quechua literacy in Peru. The principle problem seems to revolve around the fact that Quechua is not a single language as popularly believed; indeed the differences among the several lects of Quechua would lead to serious learning difficulties for most beginning learners, no matter which variety was chosen. Similarly complex problems for Black English in the United States have been reported.

In conclusion, what I have been trying to do here is: (1) suggest what the multiplicity of factors involved in the standardization process are and (2) discuss the sorts of values and functions the educational domain should consider when making decisions about the standard language. Naturally the complexities of the problem will vary from country to country. However, no country which wants to promote creativity, improved communication and advanced thinking can afford to neglect the language arts and, as a consequence, problems of standardization.

Notes

1. Although linguistic science has long taught that every child can learn his own language, it also seems true that not all children have equal command of their mother tongue. Householder, 1969, p.836, points out that there is a "dubious claim formerly made by some taxonomists, that all speakers of a given language 'master' it equally, that there are no differences in linguistic skill." It seems clear that one important role which the schools can perform is to help develop linguistic skills so that ideas can be expressed more succinctly, more fully and more clearly.

2. The term "good" needs further clarification. When a person says that a given individual writes "good" Spanish does he mean that his use of grammar is acceptable or appropriate or does he mean that his style is effective?

3. My research on standardization was made possible through my participation in the International Language Planning Processes Project ~~xxxxxxx~~ (1969-72), funded by the Ford Foundation and administered by Stanford University.

4. I go into the details in a paper entitled "Standardization" which is in the ~~draft~~ report of the International Language Planning Processes Project but which will appear in book form in the future.

5. Personal communication.

References

Vachek, Frantisek. 1970. "The Problem of Value Judgments in the Process of Standardization." Paper presented to the First International Congress of Social Sciences of the Luigi Sturzo Institute, Sept. 1967.

Jespersen, Otto. 1925. Mankind, Nation, and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View. Oslo: A. Aschoug.

Rosenfelder/ Fred. 1969. "Review of Langacker's Language and Its Structure," Language 1968 44:886-897.

Parker, Gary. 1973. "Notes on the Linguistic Situation and Language Planning in Peru," in Language Planning: Current Issues and Research, edited by Joan Rubin and Roger Shuy. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Ward, Gary. 1969. The Sounds of English. Oxford.

Wolfram, Walt. 1971. "Social Dialects from a Linguistic Perspective," in Sociolinguistics. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.